



National Conference on Weights and Measures
"That Equity May Prevail"

Article For: National Pawnbrokers Association

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Title: Weighing in on Scale Selection

Gold prices have created a modern day gold rush. Folks are bringing their jewelry to pawn shops and attending new fangled house parties to cash in on a "golden" opportunity. This increased market for buying and selling has also created an increased demand for jeweler scales.

Unfortunately, there is some frustration among scale dealers, jewelry buyers, and regulatory officials over these jeweler scales. Well intended business people are purchasing new scales only to learn from the inspector that they are not suitable for commercial use. Business owners are finding out it isn't as easy as buying a \$50.00 "jeweler scale" off the internet. How do you know what scale to buy?

The National Conference on Weights and Measures (NCWM) develops the United States standards for weights and measures. NCWM also administers the National Type Evaluation Program (NTEP). Scale manufacturers apply for NTEP certification for their devices by submitting prototypes for evaluation. NCWM authorizes government laboratories to evaluate the scales for compliance to the national standards. This evaluation goes well beyond the tests an inspector can perform, evaluating the effects of temperature, barometric pressure, power supply, and the ability to maintain calibration over time and normal use. Your scale protects your profit margin, so these assurances are significant. They are so important that 46 states require any new scale placed in commercial service to be traceable to a NTEP Certificate of Conformance.

Clearly, NTEP certification is a primary factor in selecting an appropriate scale. But there are other considerations. For example, you wouldn't consider pricing fine jewelry over a scale that has 1 pound increments. Even if it is accurate, it lacks precision, only weighing to the nearest pound. That's common sense, but how much precision is necessary? What units of measure do you need? Pounds? Ounces? Troy ounces? Pennyweight? Karat? And where will the scale be used? An inspector will look at things like air movement, vibrations, and so forth that could cause the installation to be unsuitable, especially for precision weighing.

I think you're getting the point. There are requirements to be met; requirements that are important to you and important to your customers. Here are some tips to help you make a good investment.

Know the Requirements: Call your state weights and measures authority to find out what they will require for scale capacity and division size (also referred to as readability or scale increment). Be prepared to describe the commodities you will be weighing and the quantity or size of typical weightments. States will vary on requirements in this regard, so it's an important question. For state-by-

state contact information, go to www.ncwm.net. Point to “Resources” and select “State Directors Contact Information.”

Go Window Shopping: Ask your state weights and measures official for a listing of registered or licensed service agents for small scales. Call these companies, explain what you need and ask for pricing. Tell them it needs to meet the state’s requirements for commercial use. They know what that means. If they don’t sell such precision scales maybe they can recommend another source.

Do you shop the internet? You can get some good deals out there, but it’s a “buyers beware” environment. The seller is not communicating with you to understand your needs like a local dealer would. Search on “jeweler scale legal for trade” or something similar. Go ahead and get some pricing on specific models, but don’t rush to the check-out.

Make a List: Bookmark your websites, and retain your quotes from scale dealers. You’re bound to see a vast range of pricing, features, and options. Don’t be overwhelmed. Just make a list of scales that interest you, including make, model, and NTEP Certificate number if one was provided.

Confirm Before You Buy: Just because an advertisement says “NTEP Certified” or “legal for trade” doesn’t make it true. Be cautious and confirm it first. You can ask your weights and measures office to verify NTEP certification or you can try it yourself on our website.

Simply go to www.ncwm.net and click the NTEP logo  at the top of the page. Just like that, you have the entire database of NTEP Certificates of Conformance at your fingertips. There are several ways to search for your scale. The best is to enter the Certificate number if you have it. If not, you can enter a model or a manufacturer. The model can get a little tricky because of terminology. If you find the certificate listed in your search results, look under the “Status” column to make sure it is “Active.”

Now call your state weights and measures authority again. Don’t worry; they will be glad to help you. Give them the information and ask them if the scale can be approved. They will confirm NTEP certification and probably ask some questions again about how you plan to use the scale.

That’s it. With a little homework you have peace of mind. You have invested a bit more in the scale, but with proper care it will protect your profit margin. That’s just good business.

Happy Shopping!

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